The TATLER.

By *Iſaac Bickerſtaff* Eſq;

——*Procul O! Procul eſte Profani!* Virg.

From *Thurſday December* 22. to *Saturday December* 24. 1709.

Sheer-Lane, December 23.

THE Watchman, who does me particular Honours, as being the chief Man in the Lane, gave ſo very great a Thump at my Door laſt Night, that I awakened at the Knock, and heard my ſelf complimented with the uſual Salutation of, *Good morrow Mr.* Bickerſtaff, *Good morrow my Maſters all.* The Silence and Darkneſs of the Night, diſpoſed me to be more than ordinarily ſerious; and as my Attention was not drawn out among exterior Objects, by the Avocations of Senſe, my Thoughts naturally fell upon my ſelf. I was conſidering, amidſt the Stilneſs of the Night, What was the proper Employment of a thinking Being? What were the Perfections it ſhould propoſe to it ſelf? And, What the End it ſhould aim at? My Mind is of ſuch a particular Caſt, that the Falling of a Shower of Rain, or the Whiſtling of Wind, at ſuch a Time, is apt to fill my Thoughts with ſomething awful and ſolemn. I was in this Diſpoſition, when our Bellman began his Midnight Homily (which he has been repeating to us every Winter Night for theſe Twenty Years) with the uſual Exordium.

Oh! mortal Man, thou that art born in Sin!

Sentiments of this Nature, which are in themſelves juſt and reaſonable, however debaſed by the Circumſtances that accompany them, do not fail to produce their natural Effect in a Mind that is not perverted and depraved by wrong Notions of Gallantry, Politeneſs, and Ridicule. The Temper which I now found my ſelf in, as well as the Time of the Year, put me in Mind of thoſe Lines in *Shakeſpeare*, wherein, according to his agreeable Wildneſs of Imagination, he has wrought a Country Tradition into a beautiful Piece of Poetry. In the Tragedy of *Hamlet*, where the Ghoſt vaniſhes upon the Cock's Crowing, he takes Occaſion to mention its Crowing all Hours of the Night about *Chriſtmas* Time, and to inſinuate a Kind of religious Veneration for that Seaſon.

It faded on the Crowing of the Cock.
Some ſay, That ever 'gainſt that Seaſon comes
Wherein our Saviour's Birth is celebrated,
The Bird of Dawning ſingeth all Night long;
And then, they ſay, no Spirit dares walk abroad:
The Nights are wholeſom, then no Planets ſtrike,
No Fairy takes, no Witch has Power to charm;
So hallowed, and ſo gracious is the Time.

This admirable Author, as well as the beſt and greateſt Men of all Ages, and of all Nations, ſeems to have had his Mind throughly ſeaſoned with Religion, as is evident by many Paſſages in his Plays, that would not be ſuffered by a modern Audience; and are therefore certain Inſtances, that the Age he lived in had a much greater Senſe of Virtue than the preſent.

It is indeed a melancholy Reflection to conſider, That the *Britiſh* Nation, which is now at a greater Height of Glory for its Councils and Conqueſts than it ever was before, ſhould diſtinguiſh it ſelf by a certain Looſeneſs of Principles, and a Falling off from thoſe Schemes of Thinking, which conduce to the Happineſs and Perfection of human Nature. This Evil comes upon us from the Works of a few ſolemn Blockheads, that meet together with the Zeal and Seriouſneſs of Apoſtles, to extirpate common Senſe, and propagate Infidelity. Theſe are the Wretches, who, without any Show of Wit, Learning, or Reaſon, publiſh their crude Conceptions with an Ambition of appearing more wiſe than the reſt of Mankind, upon no other Pretence, than that of diſſenting from them. One gets by Heart a Catalogue of Title Pages and Editions; and immediately to become conſpicuous, declares that he is an Unbeliever. Another knows how to write a Receipt, or cut up a Dog, and forthwith argues againſt the Immortality of the Soul. I have known many a little Wit, in the Oſtentation of his Parts, rally the Truth of the Scripture, who was not able to read a Chapter in it. Theſe poor Wretches talk Blaſphemy for Want of Diſcourſe, and are rather the Objects of Scorn or Pity, than of our Indignation; but the grave Diſputant, that reads and writes, and ſpends all his Time in convincing himſelf and the World, that he is no better than a Brute, ought to be whipped out of a Government, as a Blot to a civil Society, and a Defamer of Mankind. I love to conſider an Infidel, whether diſtinguiſhed by the Title of Deiſt, Atheiſt, or Free-thinker, in Three different Lights, in his Solitudes, his Afflictions, and his laſt Moments.

A wiſe Man, that lives up to the Principles of Reaſon and Virtue, if one conſiders him in his Solitude, as taking in the Syſtem of the Univerſe, obſerving the mutual Dependance and Harmony, by which the whole Frame of it hangs together, beating down his Paſſions, or ſwelling his Thoughts with magnificent Idea's of Providence, makes a nobler Figure in the Eye of an intelligent Being, than the greateſt Conqueror amidſt all the Pomps and Solemnities of a Triumph. On the contrary, there is not a more ridiculous Animal than an Atheiſt in his Retirement. His Mind is incapable of Rapture or Elevation: He can only conſider himſelf as an inſignificant Figure in a Landskip, and wandring up and down in a Field or a Meadow, under the ſame Terms as the meaneſt Animals about him, and as ſubject to as total a Mortality as they, with this Aggravation, That he is the only one amongſt 'em who lies under the Apprehenſion of it.

In Diſtreſſes, he muſt be of all Creatures the moſt helpleſs and forlorn; he feels the whole Preſſure of a preſent Calamity, without being relieved by the Memory of any Thing that is paſſed, or the Proſpect of any Thing that is to come. Annihilation is the greateſt Bleſſing that he propoſes to himſelf, and an Halter or a Piſtol the only Refuge he can fly to. But if you would behold one of theſe Goomy Miſcreants in his pooreſt Figure, you muſt conſider him under the Terrors, or at the Approach, of Death.

About Thirty Years ago I was a Ship-board with one of theſe Vermin, when there aroſe a briſk Gale, which could frighten no Body but himſelf. Upon the

the rowling of the Ship he fell upon his Knees, and confeſſed to the Chaplain, that he had been a vile Atheiſt, and had denied a Supreme Being ever ſince he came to his Eſtate. The good Man was aſtoniſhed, and a Report immediately ran through the Ship, That there was an Atheiſt upon the Upper-Deck. Several of the Common Seamen, who had never heard the Word before, thought it had been ſome ſtrange Fiſh; but they were more ſurpriſed when they ſaw it was a Man, and heard out of his own Mouth, That he never believed till that Day that there was a God. As he lay in the Agonies of Confeſſion, one of the honeſt Tarrs whiſpered to the Boatſwain, That it would be a good Deed to heave him over Board. But we were now within Sight of Port, when of a ſudden the Wind fell, and the Penitent relapſed, begging all of us that were preſent, as we were Gentlemen, not to ſay any Thing of what had paſſed.

He had not been athore above Two Days, when one of the Company began to rally him upon his Devotion on Ship-board, which the other denied in ſo high Terms, that it produced the Lie on both Sides, and ended in a Duel. The Atheiſt was run through the Body, and after ſome Loſs of Blood, became as good a Chriſtian as he was at Sea, till he found that his Wound was not mortal. He is at preſent one of the Free-Thinkers of the Age, and now writing a Pamphlet againſt ſeveral received Opinions concerning the Exiſtence of Fairies.

As I have taken upon me to cenſure the Faults of the Age and Country which I live in, I ſhould have thought my ſelf inexcuſable to have paſſed over this Crying one, which is the Subject of my preſent Diſcourſe. I ſhall therefore from Time to Time give my Countrymen particular Cautions againſt this Diſtemper of the Mind, that is almoſt become faſhionable, and by that Means more likely to ſpread. I have ſomewhere either read or heard a very memorable Sentence, That a Man would be a moſt inſupportable Monſter, ſhould he have the Faults that are incident to his Years, Conſtitution, Profeſſion, Family, Religion, Age, and Country; and yet every Man is in Danger of them all. For this Reaſon, as I am an old Man, I take particular Care to avoid being covetous, and telling long Stories: As I am Cholerick, I forbear not only Swearing, but all Interjections of Fretting, as Pugh! Piſh! and the like. As I am a Layman, I reſolve not to conceive an Averſion for a wiſe and a good Man, becauſe his Coat is of a different Colour from mine. As I am deſcended of the ancient Family of the *Bickerſtaffs*, I never call a Man of Merit an Upſtart. As a Proteſtant, I do not ſuffer my Zeal ſo far to tranſport me, as to name the Pope and the Devil together. As I am fallen into this degenerate Age, I guard my ſelf particularly againſt the Folly I have been now ſpeaking of. And as I am an *Engliſhman*, I am very cautious not to hate a Stranger, or deſpiſe a poor *Palatine*.

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N. B. Notice ſhall be given in this Paper, when I conclude my firſt Volume.

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